

Transcription of interview with Jerry Jameson, April 13, 2008 at the San Juan Historical Museum.

Interviewed by Mary Jean Cahail and Jim Cahail

Recorded by Jacki Riley

Transcription by Laura Tretter, May 20, 2008

Mary Jean: We have with us today Jerry Jameson and Jim Cahail and Jacki Riley who is recording. I'm Mary Jean who works at the museum and we're trying to preserve some history on Jim Crook to find out anything we can about him. And so we're very glad you could come.

Jerry: Thanks.

Mary Jean: And so if you want to just start with whatever you first remember or whatever.

Jerry: Okay, I'm Jerry Jameson and I appreciate the invitation to be here today. I have gathered some notes on some of the history of Jim. But one of my kids asked me one time who is Jim Crook. So, you know, I wondered who is Jim Crook really. So I wrote a kind of a note to my kids, I guess. And if it's alright I'll just read it because it's a real good introduction, I think. I'll try to speak clearly.

It has always been difficult for me to tell where English Camp ended and Jim Crook began. Jim was every bit as much of English Camp as the birds, the maple, the salals, and the cedar. Jim spent a long lifetime tending his warm green acres and the gentle animals in his care.

He moved with a casual ease through the seasons and seemed totally content with his life. William Crook, Jim's father, acquired English Camp by a preemption claim in 1874 and Jim was one year old at this time. And William moved his growing family into one of the vacated officer's houses and Jim was joined by sisters Mary and Rhoda.

The fire forced the family to move into the barracks building while Jim and his father started to build a house on the hill overlooking Garrison Bay. And after two years of construction the family moved into the new home in 1905.

And year after year the Crook family poured their love and sweat into the land and produced a very self sufficient farm. There were cattle, sheep, chickens, and pigs. There were apple and pear orchards and soft fruit of plums, prunes, and peaches, and apricots and large and wonderful truck garden and a spud patch.

That Jim was a kind and generous man can be proven by one of his many acts of goodness. He gave my mother and her new young husband Floyd McKay, who was grandson of the island pioneer Charles McKay, two acres of his beloved land as a wedding gift. The two acres were snuggled in the warm purple shadow of Mt. Young and

would provide a stage for much human drama. Jim was 72 years old when I made my appearance into the world and the pageantry of life on the north end of San Juan Island.

I can only wonder how Jim viewed the goings on in the larger world around him. He never married or even left the island in all his 94 years. He lived a farmers life shared with his sister Mary.

Wars came and went, depressions, and police actions, and presidential assassinations, and all of 100 years of history. He had his farm and his responsibilities and he seemed a truly happy man.

And I think that's a real good picture of how I remember Jim. He was a just a real nice guy.

Like I say he gave my mom two acres of land, which, where now the maintenance shed is. And it was 1926 Floyd McKay and my mom built that house and raised five kids there. And then Floyd got TB and died and left her with five kids. And she then married my dad and had six kids. So in that little house there was a whole bunch of us.

And throughout all of this Jim was our neighbor. And so he was generous with all his fruits and vegetables and spuds, and if mom needed something in town Jim or Mary would pick it up. He was just always there, just always a good, a real good friend. He was always there.

Mary Jean: Was Jim born out there, do you know?

Jerry: No, he was born in Wyoming. Actually on his way. His family were builders, carpenters. And so to get all the tools and stuff over they came by actually ox cart from back east, Illinois, I think.

While they were passing through Montana Jim was born. And that actually is mentioned on his headstone out at the cemetery that part of it.

Jim: He's buried out at the San Juan Valley cemetery?

Jerry: Yeah.

So it was an amazing place. Roche Harbor was going full force then. My dad worked there for most of his adult life.

For example my folks had no indoor plumbing or electricity until 1955. So we, it was good in a lot of ways, but not so good in a lot of ways. But we survived, we survived well. When mom's son was killed in France, Don, I don't know if you remember him, I think you might have known him. In '54 the phone call came to Jim's and Mary's house. So Mary comes running up and says "Aggie," my mom's name was Agnes, "Aggie you got a phone call, come on down." So she went down and heard the news. I remember

hearing the wailing coming up through the woods when she came home. He was gone. So there was always drama of varying degrees going on out there.

Jim was always just a good kind man. A good neighbor.

Mary Jean: What year did he pass away? Do you remember?

Jerry: He passed away in '67. March 9th, '67. He was born in September 29th, 1873.

Mary Jean: Did he have orchards and gardens?

Jerry: Yeah, he had apple and pear orchards 'cause we raided those regularly. They were the big thing. Cherries, pears. Yeah, it was a wonderful. He had the soft fruit. I remember plums. There are still remnants of them out there. There's actually still some apple trees out there that if you know where to look you can see them.

Mary Jean: Did he farm by horses or did he have a tractor or what?

Jerry: He had a tractor when I knew him. Cause when I knew him he was in his 80s. Cause he 74 years old when I was born in '45.

Jim: That's what Al Sundstrom yesterday said he'd remembered he built a separator or something for thrashing the grain. But he didn't know how he ever got the land tilled or how he harvested it.

Jerry: I think early on he might have had ox. Cause I remember seeing a yolk ... in the barn.

Mary Jean: oh, really.

Jerry: And so at one time I'm sure he did. Ox there too.

Mary Jean: Probably.

Jerry: And then plus back then they loaned out. 'Cause my mom's dad had a team of oxen. The name was Burr. And so they'd loan them out, borrow them. So one set of oxen would serve three or four farms out there.

Jim: Well, when you first start to remember was there more cleared land around there than just that one big field below the road there?

Jerry: Yeah, there was. Actually he had fields all the way down to the Westcott Bay. Called them the upper field, the lower field. And he also had a lot of split railed fence all over the place.

When we were kids we'd take his spilt rails 'cause we were playing cowboys and Indians. We made a town. Laid out an imprint of a salon, a hotel, and a Big area. Jim, he just looked at us and he just got other rails and replaced the ones we borrowed and left the town. He'd mow around it. He saw we that had so many hours playing in that.

Mary Jean: There have been comments about him losing an eye. Do you know what happened?

Jerry: He lost an eye. He was chopping wood one day and a chunk came up and nailed him. It came out and hung. With today's methods he could have saved his eye. But then somebody took scissors and snipped it off. I guess they'd like to kill him. So he didn't have an eye anymore.

Jim: That must have been back, quite a while back. He was always one eyed as long as I remembered. Sometimes he'd have a patch over it and other times it would be just...

Jerry: Tough old guy. One time he had a barn fall on him and he didn't come in for supper one night and Mary got worried. I don't know if you remember where the barn used to be.

Jim: On out past the house.

Jerry: Right. Anyhow there was another shed beyond it, like a tool shed. And it fell on him and he was trapped underneath it and he stayed there all day and half a night 'til Mary finally found him. Got some people, they lifted the barn off and got him out. He just dusted himself off. Like I say he was in his 80s. He was tough.

Mary Jean: What size of man was he? I mean in the pictures here he looks maybe a little bigger than average, I don't know.

Jerry: Yeah, probably 5'6" or 7", 8". Something like that.

Jim: He never seemed to be heavy, always worked so hard, I guess.

Jerry: Yeah, worked hard and ate right.

I remember, you know, we'd pop down and visit him from time to time and they'd be sitting down to lunch. I remember Mary would set the table and she had all these little bowls, different bowls of stuff like steamed potatoes, and plums, and carrots. Just all kinds of stuff, how much different things they would eat at one time. Not big portions, but a lot of them. And then we pop down and say that we just stopped in to see how they were doing. And Mary would "Thank you, now here you go, here's some candy." She'd always give us each a piece of candy. So we'd stopped down to see how they were doing on a regular basis you know. She always had candy. "Thank you, kids."

Mary Jean: Yeah, because back then you didn't have candy when you wanted it, not like they do now.

Jim: Do you remember Mary's husband?

Jerry: Captain Davis. Yeah, he was a ships captain at one time. In his later years he became an invalid. And he was a small man. And she used to pack him around like a baby. Instead of a wheel chair, she'd just pack him.

Jim: I had heard of him.

Jerry: I think he passed away before I was born even. My mom knew him.

Jacki: Did you see him do any of his wool carding, spinning or weaving?

Jerry: He may have been involved in it at times, but....

Jacki: You didn't see that as kids?

Jerry: Nothing that sticks in my mind. What does stick in my mind is he invented a rabbit trap. He ate rabbit. If he found a rabbit dead out in his farm somewhere he'd hang it till it would turn black and then he would eat it. And he said that was the British way. Yeah.

Anyhow, he had this idea that he went out in his fields and he dug a hole and put a wooden box in it with a trap door. When the rabbits would, he go out and scare rabbits or something, and they'd run in this hole with the trap door in it. So he just lift up the saw it that's over the wooden box and reach in and get the rabbit. Just slicker than heck.

Very inventive guy.

Mary Jean: Out there was a big rock wall or it was part of a building. Do you know what that was?

Jerry: Just a foundation from the old Captain's home, the house that burned. There was a fireplace.

Mary Jean: Oh. It was a fireplace

Jerry: That's still there, I think.

Jim: An amazing man. Whatever he needed, he just invented it.

Jerry: He had an ax sharpening thing, I suppose it was just a variation on a theme but it made it real easy for him. It was a big grinding wheel he'd like pedal like a bike. He'd just hold his ax on it. Slick. Save on labor.

And then when Mary was killed that happened in '59, 12/12 of '59. She was on her way home from town and ran into the back of Al's truck and was killed. Of course my mom went down to sit with Jim. Elsie Scott was there as well, she was the county nurse. And an amazing lady. Jim sat up and says "Mary should be home at any time. It's getting late, I'm getting worried." Elsie and mom would say, "Jim, she's not coming home, she's been killed." And he just didn't hear it. "Nope. She's never been this late before." He sat up waiting half the night and then he finally went to sleep. I think it took him a long time to finally adjust to that because they had been together for so many years.

Mary Jean: That's what I was going to say, they must have been together for years.

Jerry: Yeah, decades.

Jim: Did Rhoda then come right away after, and she stayed there and kind of took care of him and helped?

Jerry: She was a neat lady. She passed away in '71. February 15th of '71. She was born in 1881. Up out there.

Jim: I remember one time I was going away on the ferry and we got off the ferry over there in Anacortes. They had single lane. She was ahead of me and I thought, "Oh, man." I was in a hurry and I figured she was going to just poke along and I'd never get around her. And she hit that highway and she was gone. I remember she went 100 miles an hour.

Mary Jean: Did Jim have a truck or did he use horses for his like, gathering the hay and, or did he...do you know?

Jerry: When I knew him he had a tractor. A small tractor as I recall.

Mary Jean: Probably with something to pull behind it.

Jerry: Yeah, I'm sure he had a wagon, a flat bed wagon.

Mary Jean: And his cows were milk cows, or beef cows or both or...?

Jerry: Milk cows as I recall. He had a good barn. A chicken house. And his, I guess it was like almost like a work shop. There's remnants of that out there still. I was few years ago out there digging around and there's still a lot of the old bits of metal and stuff. The junk pile out there that can still be dug through if you wanted.

Jim: He never threw anything away.

Jerry: Nope.

Jim: Just put it over there in case he needed it.

Jerry: Right. Exactly

Jerry: Yeah, he always had spuds. I remember that. The spud patch. He had a couple of them, one down by the place and then one up at the foot of Mt. Young. He tried growing them up there, just to see what. He was very generous. He shared those.

Mary Jean: Well, yes you were a bigger family. You could certainly use them.

Jacki: He had a lot going on.

Jim: Yep. Busy all the time I guess.

Mary Jean: So he was born, well he came here and then never left the island?

Jerry: Right. I don't think he ever left the island once [...] The whole time. Like Jim was saying he rarely came into town. They each had a Model A and a Model B or...

Jim: Model A. A roadster. Kind of a faded green color I remember. I was telling them yesterday that he'd always come in, I was working at the old Ford garage. He'd come in every Saturday and get the tires pumped up. 50 cents worth of gas enough to get him home and back [for that] week.

Jerry: Waste not, want not. Yeah, that June Burn section in that magazine was good. Cause, a good little story about their friendship with the Crooks.

Jim: When Rhoda was here, was her husband here also?

Jerry: No.

Jim: Occasionally when Jim would come to town there was another fellow riding with him and I can't picture him or remember who he was. I thought, well maybe it might have been Rhoda's husband.

Jerry: I never knew Rhoda's husband.

Mary Jean: Did you see him shear the sheep and all that?

Jerry: Yeah, he was always out and about doing some, on a mission of some kind. Doing something. Checking for sheep maybe or seeing how things were going, how things were. Like one time my brother set a fire in one of his fields smoking a cigarette as I recall. And it got away from him so we went out and took our shirts off and beat it out. One brother went out for help over to get Jim. By the time Jim and my brother came back we had it pretty much out. So we got, whew. We didn't get in too much trouble. Old Jim he'd just shake his head and let it go.

Mary Jean: Did he use all the wool from his sheep for spinning or did he sell part of the wool, do you know?

Jerry: I don't think he had enough sheep to sell. But I'm sure he found a use for it. Mentioned to me his clothing. I'm not sure how much of his clothing. I know he made a suit one time. For something to do, I guess.

Mary Jean: I think they used that for mattresses too.

Jerry: I know he had a lot of blankets. As a matter of fact, he rigged a device, this was shortly before he passed away. There was a pulley above his bed with ropes. And he'd pull this and the blanket would lift up and then he'd crawl underneath and then lower the blankets on him. Snug as a bug in a rug. Good idea, you know?

Mary Jean: What did he pass away from? Just old age?

Jerry: I think just finally ill health. I think after Mary he wasn't eating right. Just kind of let himself go. And probably the flu or something like that did the.....

Mary Jean: He must have taken pretty good care of himself all those years. Eat right and rest when he needed to live that long.

Jerry: Yeah, he didn't smoke or drink.

Mary Jean: 'Cause he was a hard worker.

Jerry: Yeah, even well in his 80's, long days. Well he had his garden and that took work. And orchards, he'd prune the orchards. Always something going on somewhere.

Jim: For a long time he had to pack water to water the gardens. I don't think he even had hoses or plumbing out at the garden spots.

Jerry: That's right.

Mary Jean: Where did he build all this equipment he has for the weaving and spinning the yarn and all of that, that's out in the barn?

Jerry: That shed that fell on him.

Mary Jean: Oh.

Jerry: If I had a little piece of paper I'd draw a map as I remember. This of course it won't be to any kind of scale.

But here was the main house, here. And then they had that garage here, real close. They each had room for their cars. And then there was this big field here, and there was a truck

garden here, soft fruit orchard here, and the big barn here. He had a long chicken, he had a lot of chickens at one time,

Mary Jean: Yeah, I remember that chicken house.

Jerry: ...chicken house. And then out here, was the shed that there's still remnants of the stuff that used to be in that shed is there. And then out here was a big apple and pear orchards, way out here.

And then there was the road that went up from the house to our place which is now the maintenance shop. And half up this trail by the way there's a little trail that goes off to a cave. And my brother Ken McKay found a skeleton, a human skeleton, in there back when they were kids. They played around with it for a while. It ended up in the court house basement in a box. They tried to identify it.

Mary Jean: That's where that one came from.

Jerry: They figured it was Native American. Cause there was no belt buckles or brass or anything.

Mary Jean: That was there until yeah, right after I started working there for a long time.

Jim: Well that road came right out in front of your house and they still use it as a service road or something.

Jerry: Right. But it was some good bike ridin'. You could just shoot down there at 50 miles an hour on a bike.

Mary Jean: Were you around when he was building any of these, any of the equipment he had?

Jerry: No, I don't think so.

Mary Jean: I just wondered, I often thought, well, how in his mind, and thinking how he was going to do all this and he must have had diagrams or...

Jerry: He was amazing. He had a PTO in his tractor that ran some of the belts. Cause I remember one time seeing it in action. He rigged up his tractor somehow for power to run it. A lot of noise...as I remember.

Jim: The rigs out here in the barn have got pulleys on them, so he must have had some kind of power.

Mary Jean: So they probably heated by wood all the time, didn't they? Did they ever have electricity?

Jerry: They got electricity probably in the early '50s, maybe. 'Cause that's when we got power, we took off from what Jim had put in my uncle ran a line down.

Mary Jean: I remember when we used to go out there, there wasn't that path there and we went down by the house and parked by some building there, and then walked right by the window there, by the, I think, it was the kitchen sink or something, some counter there. Mary would be standing there working and we could see him sitting in the background.

Jim:from up by your place there and down to the fields.

Jerry: I can remember that. We used to ask Jim, cause there was good rabbit hunting down there by the block house. The block house was down here, of course. That was all fields, and we'd say "Jim could we go down and shoot some rabbits?" He'd say "Go ahead, but don't shoot the cows. Leave my sheep alone." "Okay, we will."

Mary Jean: Well, you mentioned now I think in your notes you have there that they lived in another house before the big house was built, I guess.

Jerry: Yes.

Jim: The barracks.

Mary Jean: Was it the log house or was it, was it left as part of English Camp, the building they were in?

Jerry: It was the officer's house and that burned down, and then temporarily they shifted down to the barracks which is still there and then house.

Mary Jean: Yeah, okay.

Jim: And if you ever look closely at that house that's there now the craftsmanship on that is pretty amazing. Those guys were good carpenters. William and Jim helped out his dad.

Mary Jean: Could I go out there now and walk out by the house?

Jerry: Oh sure.

Jim: Jim used to have a boat. But I don't know that I ever saw him go out in it. I don't know whether he fished or what he did.

Jerry: I think in his youth he did. Because Mosquito Pass is right out in front here. One time us kids we borrowed his boat without his permission and we rowed over to Shaw Island. It had cracks in it that like that so we stuck newspaper in it and jammed it in with a stick. We got over to Shaw and just as we hit shore it sank. So there we were on Shaw. So we had to bail it out and find something I don't know what we used to plug the cracks and then row back. And try and get it [buoyed?] up.

Mary Jean: How old were you then?

Jerry: In our early teens.

Jim: That's quite a row. I [?] rowed to limestone point back to Friday Harbor.

Mary Jean: How big a boat was it?

Jerry: It was probably a 12-15 footer. A row boat, an open row boat, big long oars.

Mary Jean: He probably, I would imagine, dug a lot of clams and fished a lot too.

Jim: Yeah, like we used to say out there, "When the tides out, the table is set." That was pretty true.

Mary Jean: Did they ever, 'cause they didn't have freezers then, so did they can?

Jerry: The canned a lot. They even canned salmon. Glass jars. Venison, actually believe, it or not. Of course all the fruits. Applesauce, and all of that. Jim actually would dry apples. He'd sliver them up. He had this big bin behind his wood stove. As big as that file there. And it was just full of apple chips drying. Get in there and fluff them up everyday or something. Lots of apple chips before they were a fad food.

Jerry: Anywho, that's briefly what I recall.

Mary Jean: That's wonderful. Thank you.